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ABSTRACT

The construct life style was used by Alfred Adler to describe the characteristic way in which individuals act and think. Followers of his theories are now collecting evidence to support or validate his contentions. The assessment of client life styles serves: (1) to make the client aware of his misconceptions, (2) as a reference point for therapy, and (3) as the focal point of personality change. Thus, the assessment procedure--done one-to-one or in groups--constitutes for Adlerians an important part of therapy. Bringing into awareness the clients misconceptions implies respect for his ability to correct his mistakes; it is a form of encouragement. A counselor, to encourage, must respect the client's right to choose. Adlerians and others think that with proper information the individual will decide more effectively. Ideal thinking and behaving is a function of a healthy interest in others; this is termed social interest. A social interest index is used to measure the extent to which an individual is interested in his fellow human beings. Adlerians are now doing systematic research on the results of life style assessments. (Author)

LIFE STYLE ASSESSMENT: SO WHAT!

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INTRODUCTION

The Viennese psychiatrist, Alfred Adler (1929), coined the phrase "life style" to describe the way in which an individual human being acts and thinks. Adler, like Freud, Jung and others, developed interviewing techniques and a theory of personality to understand psychological functioning in his patients. His theory of personality included the concept of life style. Unlike Freud, Adler contended that an individual could be understood in one interview without the use of free-associations. To facilitate such understanding, he replaced free-associations with early recollections.

Gushurst (1971) in his doctoral dissertation on early recollections (ER's) defines an ER as: "A memory of a single, unique occasion: an event that happened only once; or a specific, unique occurrence of something that happened more than once". His dissertation demonstrates that one component of the life style assessment technique-early recollections-can be used to predict an individual's characteristic movements, goals, and activities. Another significant aspect of Gushurst's dissertation is his objectification of the interpretation of "Pure positive" ER's. Mosak (1958), Dreikurs (1967) and Aubry (1972) have claimed that life style is an observable phenomena which can be inferred in an assessment interview which includes the collection of ER's from a subject.

However, these Adlerian theoreticians never have substantiated their claims that the assessment of life style--from the Adlerian framework--is reliable and valid. Hence, the need for empiracal studies on the results of Adlerians' clinical work.

Gushurst (1971) in a recent article describes the problem inherent in any projective assessment technique, e. g., diagnosticians using privately conceived norms to evaluate data generated in an interview. Also, he refers to variance found between clinicians' judgements from the same school of thought. Attarian (1973) in his work on early recollections and vocational choice found a great deal of variance between the prediction ability of two confident, skilled Adlerian therapists and a less confident, less skilled Adlerian therapist. His study demonstrates that ER's when used by the highly trained therapists can successfully predict a students choice of educational major. The above studies lay the groundwork for further research which will, in the writers opinion, further substantiate the claims made by practicing Adlerian counselor-clinicians about their therapy.

Interpretations of early recollections and data about a client's childhood family consellation arrange for what Allen (1971) and Shulman (1973) have described as the beginning point of psychotherapy.

Shulman states (1973) that the assessment of life style gives us an understanding of the client's self-concept, his view of the world, and his basic motivations. The initial assessment also serves: (1) to make the client aware of his misconceptions which typically promote pain and/or conflict; (2) as a reference point for therapy, and; (3) as a focal point of personality change. Schulman concludes by stating that the understanding of life style can be used to assess change in therapy. He notes that following the completion of successful therapy, the actual ER's or their meaning to the client usually change.

Life style assessment is an attempt to systematize the collection of data obtained from clients. This bears resemblance to other projection techniques yet in some respects differs from them. How so? Dreikurs (1957, 1971) uses the term "corrective feedback" to describe a clients reactions to correctly made interpretations. When the therapist correctly interprets the purposes of a clients behavior, thinking or values, a "recognition reflex" will occur. This phenomena is akin to the look a child gives when found with his hand in the cookie jar. The blush, startled look or twinkle in the eye is often times accompanied by a statement such as: "that's right" or "that fits". These reactions or actions inform the clinician that he/she is on the right track in building a descriptive model of the client's style of life. The absence of a recognition reflex to an interpretation by the clinician indicates that he is either on the wrong track or that he has

not accurately stated his interpretative judgements in terms of the clients frame of reference. This frame of reference is called "private logic" by Adlerians and was recently well described by Dreikurs (1973). The private logic--out of awareness beliefs, convictions or goals which may or may not be in the interest of self and others--can cause grief or happiness. It can promote or arrest human growth or be anti-social. Dreikurs claims that the private logic may be counter to the common sense which was defined by Adler (1929) as that which benefits the community. Here one finds the ever present problem of social scientists, i. e., descriptive vs. prescriptive judgements. Adlerians contend that it is "good" i. e., in the common sense to have concern for others i. e., social interest. In terms of this defined "good", a client's private logic is assessed and the basic mistakes or misconceptions are discovered. Once the misconceptions are understood by both counselor and client, therapy has started. The counseling or therapy is the beginning of what Adlerians term the encouragement process, a process which has been aptly delineated by Dinkmeyer (1963).

ENCOURAGEMENT

The life styles of many of our clients are characterized by timidity, pessimism, despair and lack of confidence or courage. Also, the individual, because of great feelings of inferiority, is usually over-ambitious.

In order to combat feelings of inferiority and the resulting over ambitiousness, encouragement--which in the case of children, Dreikure (1959) defines as: implicit faith in the child as he is, not in terms of his potentialities-is provided. The assessment of client life styles first implies a belief or recognition of the client's ability to rapidly handle and process interpretative information about himself; to most clients this belief is usually encouraging. Also, the client begins to understand that he is OK the way he is. Harris (1969) and others have described OK'ness from the viewpoint of transactional analysis. Part of the acceptances of such OK'ness is brought about by the counselor indicating time and time again that we all make mistakes, we all can learn. This invites the client to rejoin the human race on more equal and secure footing.

In counseling or therapy, the client is also told that he/she really can't be blamed (held responsible) for mistakes (life goals) formed in childhood. In his family, school, state, etc., it is understandable, we say, that he saw life as difficult, hurtful, unfair, or whatever his favorite belief might have been and is. However, the counselor asks: does the client wish to continue to see life as unfair or cruel as an adult? A choice thus confronts the client: 'to maintain his viewpoints or goals and feel hurt, depressed or angry, or change his goals and develop self-confidence and become more functional and feel happier.6

Posing the choice and letting the client decide reflects the kind of respect that most of our clients have not experienced; it is encouraging.

Adler (1930) used the construct "creative self" to describe his belief in the individual's ability to decide in a constructive direction. Maslow (1968) and Rogers (1961) have used the concept of self actualization to describe the human beings tendency under proper conditions to move in a positive direction. In some ways, perhaps, the only basic difference between Adlerian and Rogerians is the way in which they arrange conditions for an individual to find self-fulfillment. The Adlerian deals with maladaptive cognitive structures which prevent proper functioning and hence he confronts clients with information about their maladaptive goals, e. g., -- life style assessment --so as to provide clients with conscious choices about new direction for their lives. It is assumed that the information must be conveyed to a client in a way that he can understand, that is, in terms of his private logic. Such understanding, it is hypothesized, will usually result in the client deciding to change. A great many counseling sessions are typically not required.

The Rogerians on the other hand believes that an individual must "achieve" an awareness and acceptance of his feelings.

The awareness-acceptance is the function of a relationship to a therapist which includes certain ingredients, e. g., empathy, unconditional positive regard, and congruence, to name a few. The emphasis, the focus of the interview, is on feelings rather than private logic or thinking.

However, both the Adlerian and Rogerian theoretician believe or are committed to a model of man which is encouraging: man is capable of and does determine his own destiny. The power to decide, to move, to change resides in each individual, not in a group, a state or a collective.

All social scientists, as they encourage individuals to assume more responsibility for their lives, must use their conscious and less-than-conscious values to encourage their clients. For example, should man be free, should he be responsible for himself. If yes, why? What social systems benefit the human race? And for the purposes of this paper, what constitutes a functional or ideal life style?

IDEAL LIFE STYLES AND RESEARCH

Dreikurs (1973) states that an individual can be very co-operative, and contribute a great deal to his fellows, yet be subject to a life style that is maladaptive in certain areas of his life.

For example, an individual may be very competent on a job but at the same time be a poor husband or father. In Adler's terms (1929), a fully functioning individual must lead a successful life in three distinct task areas: 1) work, 2) social, and 3) love, and he saw all of these tasks as being intimately social or having social consequences.

Adler (1929), Dreikurs (1971) and other Adlerians have used the construct "social interest" as a guage of mental health. Social interest is defined as: "the innate aptitude through which the individual becomes responsive to reality, which is primarily the social situation" (Ansbacher and Ansbacher, 1956). The "healthy" individual has a well developed interest in others.

Greever, Tseng and Friedland (1973) recently developed a scale to measure the extent to which an individual has social interest. Extreme high and low scores on their social interest index correlate significantly with certain California Psychological Inventory scales. High scores were judged independently by judges familiar with Adlerian methodology in terms of the amount of social interest attributed to the subjects. The overall percentage of accuracy of these judges to social interest scores was 85%.

Results of research on life style assessments, on Adlerian psychotherapy-in groups and one-to-one, and on changes reflected in early recollections, before and after psychotherapy,

on changes in behavior, and altered scores on tests such as the social interest index encourage the continued usage of the assessment of life style. It is understood that more research is needed on the assessment process. McCarthy (1974) at Humboldt State University has written a Masters thesis on clinical thought process in Adlerian life style work. Additional work is needed on the results of life style assessments and data from projective tests such as the TAT on the same subjects to further establish concurrent validity.

SUMMARY

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Bringing into awareness the clients misconceptions implies respect for his ability to correct his mistakes; it is a form of encouragement. A counselor, to encourage, must respect the client's right to choose. Adlerians and others think that;

with proper information the individual will decide more effectively.

Ideal thinking and behaving is a function of a healthy interest in others; this is termed social interest. A social interest index is used to measure the extent to which an individual is interested in his fellow human beings. Adlerians are now doing systematic research on the results of life style assessments.

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